

# FIRST 5 S H A S T A

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## School Readiness Makes Connections for Life!

Every year, approximately 500,000 young Californians march off to kindergarten. This is an exciting time for youngsters – first backpack, first ride on the big yellow bus, new friends, and a whole new world of learning. Parents often cross their fingers and hope their little ones are *really* prepared for school. Beyond the backpack, there is so much more parents can do to help children gear up for school. They can inspire early learning connections that lead to school readiness. It's amazing to think this begins at birth. And it begins with the relationship between child and parent.

As the child's first teacher, parents begin to lay a foundation for learning, one experience at a time. Those early years, from birth to age five, offer parents the opportunity to give their personal best to their children. Regardless of income levels, education levels, professional status, health status or ethnicity, all parents face some hurdles when raising young children. To make sure parents have the support they need to give children what *they* need, school readiness programs are being established in California communities. School readiness is as much about the parent and the community as it is about the child and the school.

In response to a continuing drop in test scores for California students, the 2001 School Readiness Initiative was approved. It dedicates a portion of the funds received by First 5 California (the Prop 10 Commission) to starting school readiness programs in counties throughout California. It was decided that the best way to begin these programs was to make funding available to areas with "low performing" schools.

If students in elementary school are going to be eager and able learners, communities must support families in preparing children for the day they begin kindergarten. California school readiness programs are designed to do just that. The following five essential elements guide the creation of these programs:

1. Early Care and Education *Increases quality child care and early education options for families with young children; insures further training is offered to early care providers.*
2. Family Support *Provides fun and educational classes to families including recreation and parent education.*
3. Health and Social Services *Provides services such as counseling, pre-natal, dental and health referrals, and screening and referrals for children with special needs.*
4. School Capacity *Connects preschool, kindergarten and first grade education planning and practices.*
5. Infrastructure *Provides the behind-the-scenes administrative support that insures the program runs smoothly; involves parents of young children in school decisions.*

Individual counties and communities rely on this framework of elements to help link local resources and services with parents and schools, forming a school readiness partnership.

Whether parents are expecting a child or have children under five at home, they can take advantage of the support their local school readiness partnership offers. North state counties are beginning to benefit from the School Readiness Initiative with programs in place in Butte,

Siskiyou and Shasta counties. Tehama County applied for school readiness funding in June and hopes to receive an award this September. This would result in new programs this year for the Gerber Union Elementary School District and the Los Molinos Unified School District. Both elementary schools currently serve grades kindergarten through eight and have a state preschool on campus.

First 5 Butte has named its school readiness effort “Project SEEDS” for *Success Early in Education and Development*. This partnership was funded in 2001 and includes two schools in the Chico area, Chapman Elementary and Rosedale Elementary, and three Oroville-area schools including Oakdale Heights Elementary, Poplar Avenue Elementary (Thermalito), and Berry Creek Elementary (Berry Creek). At remote Berry Creek, the preschool program has expanded to full day and a parent liaison and school nurse offer services to children and families on campus and in the home.

Three agencies have joined together to deliver Siskiyou County’s *Butte Valley School Readiness Program*. The Butte Valley Elementary School, the Mountain Valleys Health Clinic and the Montessori Preschool are all partners in this effort. It was funded through the Siskiyou Children and Families Commission in March 2002. This program highlights health and preschool services, the development of a new Family Resource Center, a six-week summer school for pre-kindergartners, and expansion of the Even Start literacy program (Spanish speaking tutor included).

In Shasta County, First 5 Shasta and the Redding School District have partnered to create programs at Cypress Elementary School and Juniper Academy. These “school readiness” schools are no longer just for school-age kids and teachers. They are places for parents to enjoy a Wiggleworms or Munchkins in Motion class with their child. They are places where child care providers from the local area can get the continuing training they need for their work. Parents can earn their own computer and books for their children by attending literacy-based parent education classes. To make sure parents are connected with these services and more, a family advocate is available at each school. This specially trained “helper” is able to identify the developmental needs of a child and can even help families enroll children in the Healthy Families insurance program, making immunizations and checkups free!

As a school readiness partner, Shasta Head Start is currently building a new Early Head Start center on the Juniper Academy campus. This center will serve children from infancy through age three. The existing state preschool serves children from age three through age four. This means that quality educational services for children will soon be available on campus from birth, to preschool, to kindergarten and throughout elementary and middle school!

All of these school readiness programs work to enhance the early experiences children share with their parents. The care we give our children in their earliest years really does have *everything* to do with getting ready for school. Day to day interactions with children may seem small. But they build strong connections that children and parents need to continue approaching greater challenges in life. Every time you cuddle your baby or read to your toddler, you are nurturing a loving bond that translates to your child “I am safe. I bring joy.” Every time you admire your preschooler’s magnificent noodle art or laugh at his “knock-knock” joke, you are encouraging explorations in learning and communicating. School readiness – it’s as much about loving as it is about learning.

# FIRST 5

## S H A S T A

First 5 Shasta offers parents and caregivers the following list of everyday activities that provide children **early lessons** in **math, colors and shapes, hygiene, social interaction, reading** and more:

- **Laundry sorting:** Ask your child to match up the socks or find all the T-shirts and count them. That is an early lesson in math.
- **Walking around the neighborhood:** Point to grass and leaves on trees and teach your child the color green; ask your child what color the sky is; play a game of “how many red cars can you spot?” That is an early lesson in colors.
- **Grocery shopping:** Ask your child to identify the color of broccoli, bananas and apples, and talk about the different shapes of the produce. That is an early lesson in colors and shapes.
- **Singing in the car:** Sing songs to your child while driving to the store, taking a walk or doing the dishes. This is an early lesson in language.
- **Picking up medicine from the pharmacy:** Let your child pay the cashier or ask the clerk where to find baby powder. That is an early lesson in interacting with people.
- **Cooking:** Explain why we wash our hands before meals and why we clean the counter before and after cooking. That is an early lesson in hygiene and food safety.
- **Eating breakfast:** Ask your child to pass the jelly or the cereal. That is an early lesson in sharing.
- **Playing with siblings or friends:** Ask your child to pass the toy to her friend or sibling after using it for a few minutes. That is an early lesson in sharing and taking turns.
- **Going to the dentist:** Ask your child to draw a picture about a recent trip to the dentist, and give your child the opportunity to express how it made her feel (e.g., refreshed, excited, nervous). That is an early lesson in storytelling and an opportunity to express feelings.
- **Cleaning up after play time:** Ask your child to put the toys away, and offer a reward such as an extra story at bedtime. That is an early lesson in following directions.
- **Setting the table:** Count the number of forks on the table and then the number of napkins. Ask your child if he can add the two numbers together. That is an early lesson in math.
- **Going to the park:** Ask your child how it feels to run around in the grass, to play on the bars or to climb to the top of the slide. Reinforce the importance and fun of exercising regularly. That is an early lesson in physical activity.
- **Reading stories, lists and signs:** Read a bedtime story to your child; review items on the grocery list and ask your child to sound out hard words; read street signs out loud. These are early lessons in reading.